

cluded nook; yet, if one whispered, the man and boy on the next one could not overhear, the tired woman with an unnecessary and quite unornamental shawl over her head, who was lingering past and staring at them, need see nothing. Desperately Teresa brought out that inspirational litany—love's own formula, that never fails to rush to the lips at need.

"Do you think about me sometimes, when you're doin' other things, at the shop? I kep' a-thinkin' about you all day, an' then maw'd get just as mad at me because I didn't hear her when she'd speak to me." So the first intonation.

Billy, her congregation, responded: "Betcha." Then, "What did I seem to be doin' in them thinks of your'n?"

"Nothin'. You was just there—like now."

"Like—now?"

Like now. The cradling arm back of Teresa's shoulders drew her close; the resting-place for her head was meant for no other purpose in life. The cheek that touched hers, the lips that responded to her litany without words—these meant that she had Billy at last. Not so much of his attention as could be spared from an anxious looking ahead, or so little as was left after the jar and fret of ordinary human intercourse, but the whole creature, for the moment set to that same note which trembled through her. This it was that had been ordained from the foundations of time!

**THROUGH** what was left of April, on into May and June and July, when summer nights, one after another, like a procession of Ethiop queens, took the city and held it in warm, jeweled black hands, Teresa slipped away to the square to meet her lover as regularly as the nights came. "Llo, Tress!"—"Llo, Billy!" was the pass-word to that World of Other Estimates—a place of moon and stars, of dusk, spaciousness, and love.

Entering it did not destroy permanently the facts of ordinary living. Monday morning still brought Monday's wash. Nothing but good screens could have kept the flies out of the Durgan flat; nothing but the coming of fall would abate its intolerable temperature. But memory of the hours with Billy sometimes walked, shod in silent, cool dusk, right into the sizzling rooms next morning, whispered above the weird whir of flies on the ceiling, brought something to her nostrils and ears that was not the smell of daily life, the noise of its contentions. When it came, teething babies and hot weather, and a tormented father who believed he was getting a bone felon on his thumb, mattered as little as the humming of the flies.

At such times Durgan and his wife scarcely knew what to do with Teresa. The ordinary family discipline passed her by and left her unscathed, smiling, aloof.

"You've got to come down on her harder—like I do," the night watchman admonished his spouse. "Don't you see she's gittin' too much for you? They all do 'bout her age."

Then, in August, came the time that Billy went away to try for that better job. He attempted to explain fully to Teresa; but she only wiped furtive tears and was sulky.

"Ain't you makin' a livin' now?" she asked resentfully. "I wisht you wouldn't go."

And that was so sweet that Billy had to answer it with lovers' nonsense, rather than bleak wisdom concerning his present job and the amount of money a couple dare marry on.

Disasters seem to attract each other. On the first day of Billy's absence Jess's baby was so sick that they had to send for a doctor—a desperate pass financially and physically for people in their situation. Poor Jess fretted almost as much over the anticipated bill as she did about the condition of her child.

In the next twenty-four hours Durgan's felon arrived—and drove him frantic. Mrs. Durgan labored at dressing his hand and doing his bidding, and she sent Teresa upstairs to help the married sister. The days were one long nightmare, and

when night came down, merciful, wide-winged, with healing in her pinions, there was no Billy waiting outside in the dusk for Teresa to fly to. Instead, during the latter part of the time, they had to sit up with the baby. Jess insisted that Carl mustn't lose sleep, or he might fall off the scaffolding next day—he was a painter. Teresa felt that her keeping watch wasn't much use, for Jess came every fifteen minutes to look at the boy, and Carl rose up in bed and groaned at their whisperings.

**BILLY'S** stay was to be a week. The first six days and nights of it brought Teresa to the pass where life on any terms was not worth having. Her flesh quivered on her bones. Her whole body seemed to hum and sing. Her head felt light and queer. She could hardly imagine how it would be to go down into the square at the appointed time and find Billy waiting for her; yet toward this consummation something in her subconsciously yearned every waking moment, whatever she was doing. It haunted such sleep as she got; it was like thirst or hunger.

Nobody ate regular meals any more in either flat. Mrs. Durgan fed her man when he roared for food; she snatched her sleep when he could sleep. The entire establishment had a bone felon on its thumb.

Above stairs in Jess's flat Carl got his own meals, silently, stolidly. Teresa could almost feel the weight of his dumb hostility. The sisters picked up anything they could find, and ate it as they moved about, carrying the baby to soothe it, or doing the housework.

That last day, the evening of which would bring Billy, stretched out interminably; yet the sun did go down upon it, and just after what would have been dinner—if there had been any dinner—Teresa came to the street and looked about her.

Everything seemed wavy and queer. The people out here were not real. Even the familiar figure across there, waiting, seemed to be a long way off. She felt as if she had traveled miles to reach the wonted—

"Llo, Tress!"

"Llo, Billy!"

After that, with Billy's arm around her, they got to their bench, and found it mercifully empty.

"Oh, Billy—oh, Billy!" In the relaxation of the moment the words were a sort of wail.

"Did you miss me as much as all that?" "Oh—it's been awful! Jess's baby's sick, and paw's got a felon on his thumb, an' you can't have a minute's peace anywheres."

Billy did not tell her that she could have peace now—there was no need. Her head had found its old resting-place, his arm was round her, his cheek dropped over against hers; the two trembled to one ecstasy, beyond peace or rest.

"Poor kid—you've had an awful time! I'm a-goin' to take care of you now."

She stirred in his hold, pushing her face a little toward his neck, as the baby was wont to move on her shoulder as she paced the floor with it. In the plenitude of her relief, she murmured:

"Jess and Carl just hate each other."



"It seemed to her that the steps were double their usual number. Would Billy be gone?"

"I guess not"—with male tolerance. "Married folks has to scrap a little—bein' human; but I reckon they—"

"He hates her, anyhow. He won't even speak to her, if he can help himself."

"Aw—I guess that's just his way. He was crazy to get her two years ago."

**CRAZY** to get her two years ago! Teresa took that into her tired consciousness, and it reverberated ominously. She had been child enough during Jess's courtship to help the young couple out in securing that privacy denied love by poverty. It flashed back upon her mind that Jess and Carl might have felt very much then as she and Billy did now! Oh, no—not that. Never!

"I expect Jess and Carl think a heap of each other yet," Billy's voice roused her.

"Well, paw and maw don't."

Teresa was a little surprised at her own mention of parents who, in thus naming them, started suddenly forth as individuals—persons who had at one time been prompted to the adventure of marriage by— No, her wildest imaginings

could not link the word "love" with them.

"They hate each other, all right."

"You just think so." It was easy for Billy.

"Don't I live right with 'em? Don't I know?"

She leaned back and closed her eyes against him. Behind those dropped lids her mind raced like wildfire through the list of married people that ended with her own parents. Marriage—what had it to do with love?

"All married folks hate each other!" she burst out.

Billy laughed indulgently, as if she had said something childish, instead of expressing bitter, hard-wrung wisdom.

"Well, then you're goin' to get a chance to hate me pretty soon," he teased. "You ain't asked about it, but I'm tellin' you. I got my job. We can be married now any time you say."

She rested very quietly on his arm, her eyes still closed. She had a mounting terror of movement or speech. So a rabbit crouches before intruding danger, striving to keep so motionless that it may be passed over. Billy meant marriage. She knew marriage. Love was not in it. She would say him neither yea nor nay—she would evade as she had evaded. Winter was a long way off yet. Billy's words were, "Any time you say." He left her the say. Ah—she was safe!

The silence was long. It ended with her breathed sigh of relief, the relaxing of her tense body against him.

Billy, who had been gazing at her pale little face with its bluish shadows about the closed eyelids, took this as a signal to push his cheek against hers and press her lips with his own.

"Don't!"

She was free of his arm and on her feet, weariness forgotten in the wild terror of a heart that hammered at her ribs.

"What's the matter, honey?"

He sat a moment where she had left him, and Teresa stood before him, poised for flight. Then he got slowly to his feet. A man asleep on a near-by

bench raised his head to look and listen. Billy drew nearer.

"What is it?" he whispered.

As he came on Teresa retreated. She backed away till she brought up awkwardly against a bush, glanced about, and saw that she was not going in the direction of home, then turned to face her pursuer. That was what he seemed. In that moment he was a stranger; the love-light in his eyes was only the keen foresight of the hunter. It seemed to his palpitating quarry that she must fight for her life.

"Let me alone, Bill Ford. I'm going right back to the house now—I am! You let me alone!"

"Why, honey!" his voice reckoned with her weakness, groped toward some lack in himself. "Didn't I do right someway? What is it you want me to do?"

"Go away!"—desperately.

"Don't you want to see the ring?"

A moment she hung on fleeing foot. Then realization of what the ring stood for swung her round.

"No!" she cried over her shoulder.

He caught her at the curb.

"See here," he demanded, putting himself between her and the street. "What's